



BY LARRY MORRIS—THE WASHINGTON POST

ROUND 2

A Mill That No Longer Turns

Mary Hanson's Close to Home article of Sept. 1 calls attention to the regrettable condition of one of Washington's historical treasures, a water-powered grist mill built in the 1820s and located in the heart of Rock Creek (at Tilden Street and Beach Drive).

As a National Park Service volunteer at Pierce Mill, I was assisting the miller, Ted Hazen, on an April day in 1993 when the mill broke down. Since then, the machinery has been silent. The water wheel, main shaft and wooden gears that drive the mill stones all need replacement. Much of the living history of an operating grist mill dating to the earliest years of Washington's existence is no longer on view to groups of local schoolchil-

dren and visitors from all over the United States and abroad. While something can still be learned from viewing the mill in a static as opposed to an operating condition, its appeal is much reduced.

The National Park Service is operating on a very tight budget these days, and its national capital area division has decided that repairs to other facilities in the area are of higher priority than those needed at Pierce Mill, which were estimated in 1993 to cost \$250,000. In the meantime, the wooden machinery continues to deteriorate, and restoration becomes increasingly more costly.

Pierce Mill is the only survivor of what were once eight water mills on

Rock Creek. During the 1800s the mill ground as much as 150 bushels of wheat a day for local sale and for export through the port of Georgetown. Additional operating funds would allow the preparation of educational exhibits on milling and the vital part it played in the economy of early Washington, further enhancing the attractiveness of the mill as a tourist attraction. This fascinating part of the history of our area should not be lost.

Unfortunately, Hanson's suggestion that the National Park Service (NPS) set up a nonprofit organization to fund the restoration of the mill is not possible under current law. However, an

NPS foundation does exist and could be the recipient of donations from private foundations, corporations and private citizens. Nothing is likely to happen without a demonstration of citizen support for the restoration of Pierce Mill.

Money raised privately would be evidence of such support and might convince Congress to provide matching funds. I would be willing to assist in organizing a "Friends of Pierce Mill" association or committee to plan a fund-raising effort on behalf of the mill. Those interested in joining me in this effort please call and leave a message at 301-718-3105.

—Richard D. Abbott